

TIME AND CLASS:  
SOCIAL ASPECTS OF TIME IN 17TH and 18TH CENTURY ENGLAND

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Archaeology is on the brink of a major theoretical debate. It concerns the use of time, supposedly the special province of archaeology, in archaeological explanation. The debate seems to reside in a conflict between what I shall call 'social-time' and 'abstract-time'. Proponents of a social approach to time in archaeology have argued that instead of seeking explanations by looking at changes relative to an abstract time scale, we should produce explanations framed within a social time scale which is meaningful to the society in question. I am fully in agreement with this, but I believe that there is a need to be more precise.

Social time, as it is often discussed, is a concept too monolithic to be usable. Both time and society need to be broken down into more meaningful units. Time can be looked at in reference to social organisation and society can be broken down into constituent groups, such as classes, lineages, genders, etc. For a social notion of time to be useful for interpretive purposes, I believe that it is necessary to examine how these various groups differ in the way they look at time. For example, do specific groups in society show any vested interest in 'time'?

In this article I shall make a preliminary attempt at such an examination for later 17th and 18th century England. I shall begin by subdividing 'time' and then society into smaller components. The evidence for this study comes from bodies of material culture as well as contemporary texts and modern historical analyses. To begin with though, what do we mean by time?

Aspects of Time

In an influential article, Goody (1968) stressed that time was a socially organised construct. He identified three aspects of this organisation: time measurement, time allocation and the attitudes of a society towards time. Time measurement relates to how people organise the passage of time/events. Systems commonly used are related to cosmic and human cycles. Cosmic cycles measure time by the day, month, season and year. Human cycles centre upon the rites of passage through stages of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age. Time allocation concerns the apportioning of time for future use. The traditional office day, for instance, allocates a certain period for work (9am to 5pm). Outside of this, time is allocated for pleasure. In Puritan society, Sunday was allocated for rest. Attitudes to time of a society

relate to the notions people have towards the past, the present and the future.

It is these aspects that shall be discussed with reference to late 17th and 18th century England. I shall attempt to show that attitudes to time differ between social classes, and also between the 'urban-world' and the 'rural-world'. As the period progresses there are especially marked changes in time allocation and in people's attitudes towards time. In the latter respect there is an interesting contrast between the gentry and other groups of society and between social measurement of time and abstract conceptions.

All of these aspects of time can be related to features of material culture. It is important to note, though, that material culture does not merely reflect these aspects of time, but plays an increasingly important role in maintaining them.

Social Structure 1660 to 1780

It is possible to derive some idea of social structure from demographic records of the period. Works by Wilson (1600) and King (1695) (quoted in Cressy 1976 31) outline an economic hierarchy from which five groupings can be distinguished: the gentry, the urban citizens and burgesses, yeomanry, artisans and commoners. The gentry were rural landowners. As local squires, they administered the law through the office of the Justice of the Peace. Following the Interregnum (1644-1660) they were the dominant political power in the land (Hill 1967). The yeomanry were the more prosperous of the rural peasants with small agricultural holdings. In the years after 1660, they began to decline in numbers. The artisans were manufacturers, the masters of workshops producing a range of commercial goods. The commoners were the rural and the urban poor. They were the manual agricultural workers and the wage labourers of the cities and towns. The urban citizens and the burgesses were people with economic interests in the fields of education, commerce, the law and industry (Colquhoun 1810, cited in Barell 1982, 17). Together they make up what are commonly called the 'middling orders' by historians.

Certain groups were more strongly related to either the urban or rural sphere on the basis of economic interests (Figure 1). In general, one can say that the gentry, the yeomanry and the rural commoners were involved in the rural world, while the middling orders, the artisans and the urban commoners had urban interests. Although the gentry had influence in the towns and the cities, and industrialists (part of the middling orders) began with business interests in the country, this generalization makes a useful starting point.

Time Measurement

Time measurement has been related above to the cosmic cycle and the events of the human life cycle. The present discussion, however, is directed at the use of the daily and seasonal cycles of work to

	URBAN	RURAL
GENTRY	summer residences in London	large country house residences and landed estates in the country
MIDDLE CLASSES	business interests in the city	purchase landed estates when possible and 'become' Gentry
YEOMANRY		small estates in the country
COMMONERS	manual workers in the cities	agricultural labourers in the country

Figure 1: A simplified scheme of the relationships between the classes and the 'rural' and 'urban' worlds in 17th and 18th Century England.

structure the activities of the social calendar. Although this may seem to imply that work was the main means of time orientation, this was not the case. The social aspects of work structured and defined that work as much the reverse. This was especially the case in the rural world.

A separation can be made between the holiday and the daily calendar. The daily schedule might seem to have been rigorously defined in farm manuals noted by Thompson (1967). The working day began close to dawn and continued until about seven or eight in the evening. The morning and afternoon sessions were punctuated by short breaks and there was a lunch break in the middle of the day for food and alcohol. This outline, however, gives an idealised impression -- the reality was somewhat more flexible. Time during the day was measured more by the task than by the hour: it was thus much more seasonally determined than the above description implies (even manuals allow for a break in summer for a sleep during the day). Records show how the work patterns of fishing communities in Sunderland followed the tides, and the same pattern may be assumed for similar communities elsewhere. Night was the 'working day' for hunters, it was then that they set their snares and waited to check them (Thompson 1967, 62). Markham's *Enrichment of the Weald of Kent* written in 1660 details how the type of crops cut during the harvest was the measure of a "daywork". The taller and more densely spaced a crop within a field, the smaller was the area expected to be worked in a day (Thompson 1967, 59). In the 'rural-world', therefore, the day was marked by the task rather than a preconceived schedule.

Within the week the passage of time was marked by a schedule of social activities. The Church and the village green were centres of such activity. Church would be attended once or twice on a Sunday and perhaps again during the week. Diaries such as those of Thomas Turner and Richard Baxter show that the Church was regularly attended by all the community. Following mass the classes went their separate ways. Turner, a general retailer and one-time school teacher, usually marked his Sunday by a visit to the local tavern with other middling class villagers. Regularly returning in a drunken stupor he would vow never to do the same again (Turner 1979, 72). The strongly Puritan family of Richard Baxter would spend Sunday after church by reading passages from the Bible. The young Richard Baxter notes that when he was young the other village children would be playing games on the village green (Baxter, *A Christian Directory* [1678] cited in Wrightson 1982, 183). His father objected, considering such activities to be ungodly on the Sabbath. Such Puritan restriction was common in the 17th century.

The daily regime was part and parcel of a larger annual calendar, punctuated and measured by a series of important festive events, a mixture of the sacred and secular. For the most part the timing was oriented to the important aspects of the Church year, however the substance of events was of a much more secular character. There were celebrations at Christmas, Easter and Whitsun, marked by popular recreations. The Easter period witnessed a concentration of fairs, particularly on Easter Monday and Tuesday. The Whitsun Ales marked out the Whitsun celebrations. Tied into this calendar were the celebrations on 'Plough Monday' (the first Monday after the Twelfth day of Christmas) and Shrove Tuesday, a holiday commonly associated with apprentices (Malcolmson 1973, 28). Finally there were the May Day feasts, on either the 1st or the 29th of the month.

In addition, various events were observed on an irregular schedule. Parish feasts marked by fairs and wakes were celebrated locally. The wakes were the more important occasions, the communities' own carnivals celebrated on the local parish Saint's day. Hillman noted that the parish wake "in a great many places continues still to be observed with all sorts of rural Merriments, such as Dancing, Wrestling, Cudgel-playing, etc." (Hilman 1710, quoted in Malcolmson 1973, 16-17).

These major public festivities reinforced a larger form of task orientation, affecting a greater proportion of the community. Despite the association of the wakes with the local parish Saint, for which one might expect a random spread throughout the year, they were intimately involved in the seasonal rhythms of agricultural life, in both form and scheduling. They took place at a time of agricultural convenience, at the end of one set of tasks and the beginning of another (Malcolmson 1973). The parish wakes, rather than being randomly distributed, were concentrated during the late spring/early summer and the late summer/early autumn. They followed the sowing and the harvesting respectively.

For the most part, therefore, there seems to have been a close relationship between time measurement and work habits. The major breaks in an annual cycle of seasonal tasks were marked by public social activities. Although some events were particular to a certain time, such as the May and Whitsun celebrations, for the most part the events themselves involved commonplace activities; it was their placing that marked off time.

All classes practised a similar orientation to the task. The gentry kept a timetable related to social events of the Court, the tasks of estate management and the administering of justice. Works of contemporary literature indicate that time measurement was also reckoned by the social calendar, the 'Season' of high society. The type of time measurement, therefore, transcended class interests (Figure 2).

#### Time Allocation

Time can be organised for expenditure at a later date -- it can be either spent or saved (Goody 1968, 38). In this respect it becomes a separate entity, distinct from its association with specific tasks. Hill has argued that with the passing of the 17th century and the coming of the 18th, people took a much more rigorous attitude toward their economic interests (Hill 1967). This can be seen in the changes in the form of time allocation.

As has been discussed above, at the beginning of the period, time was allocated according to the job -- scheduling corresponded with logical breaks within the working practice. By the end of the period mechanical devices paced time in the urban environment. Gone were the obvious breaks: the new work like the new time, was an endless succession of arbitrary units that could be allocated from the outside.

In the rural world, time allocation remained tied into the annual agrarian cycle. Manuals such as that of Markham tried to standardise a schedule, but the overall rationale seems determined by the requirements of the season. This is not to say that the rural world remained unchanged. Farm management became more organised, and oriented towards profit (Hill 1967, 174), but the task as the basic unit remained the same.

The experience was different in the urban world. Changes in timekeeping devices coincided with changes in the attitudes of employers and employees. At the beginning of the 17th century, the majority of parishes had a clock, but they were ornamental rather than practical and were adjusted by sun dials. The invention of the pendulum came in 1658 and the spiral spring was introduced for watches in 1674 (Milham, 1923, 142-9). Both inventions allowed the possibility of greater accuracy, but it was not until much later that even minute hands appeared. By the 1730's, the claims for accuracy by the clock and watch makers were impressive. In 1730, John Harrison claimed an accuracy of 2-3 seconds per year. By 1810, this was increased to just one second every two

	TIME MEASUREMENT	TIME ALLOCATION	ATTITUDES TO TIME
1800			The gentry stress continuity of the past into the present through classical material culture.
		Middling orders begin to institute the measurement and allocation of the task by the hour.	(The middling orders ape the gentry)
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1700			The gentry stress the continuity of the past, present and future by appeal to general laws, idealised in material culture.
		Measurement and allocation of the time made according to the task.	(attitudes of the yeomanry and commoners as yet invisible)
1600			

Figure 2: A simplified scheme of the changing relationships between social classes and aspects of time in 17th and 18th Century England.

(from the records of the Watchmakers Guild in London quoted in Thompson 1967, 65).

It seems that the desire for accuracy was a secondary concern. The market for timepieces was among the wealthy. The image of the lives of the gentry suggests that they had no need of such accurate means of time measurement, and the elaborate ornamentation indicates more of a status role for these timepieces. Commoners were known to have purchased these items through the formation of 'watch clubs', but Thompson (1967, 70) has suggested that this was for purposes of investment as much as any interest in time allocation.



It is to the middling classes, the employers of labour that we have to turn to see signs of a vested interest in time allocation. The first clocks began to appear in the larger towns in the sixteenth century. When they began to spread they were the gifts of the local employers, estate owners and their managers.

In the later part of the 18th century the Industrial Revolution really gained impetus. Factory production boomed and with it the need for organised labour. Rapid improvements in the speed of transport, produced by new roads and canals, provide evidence for the importance of time in the new economy (Porter 1982 Chapters 5 and 8).

The oral folklore of the period highlights a degree of contention between the classes brought about by the change over to this new, regimented system of time allocation. The verses composed by working people speak of a 'Saint Monday', implying a holiday, a continuation of Sunday. Thompson (1967, 73) records a whole series of comments made by employers which tell of employees habits: "We see Saint Monday so religiously kept in this great city...in general followed by a Saint Tuesday also." In Sheffield, such Monday idleness was used as the time for repairs to the machinery.

The evidence is still scarce, but changes in the material culture and the economy support the belief that strict time allocation was more in the interests of the middling classes than any other. The conflict between the externally imposed time allocation of the industrial arena and the natural rhythms of the employees brought up within a rural framework emphasises this difference.

#### Attitudes to Time

Returning to Goody (1968, 39-40), we learn that attitudes to time are social conceptions of the past, present and the future. These attitudes place people within a historical context, define where people have come from, justify where they stand and express where they wish to be. During the period examined here, evidence for these attitudes comes mainly from literary and historical sources and only indirectly from the material culture. For the most part such sources relate to the gentry. The middling classes, yeomen and commoners did not articulate their relationship to time in a manner that has remained visible. This difference is significant. Time was a part of the ideological framework of the gentry: it provided an order and a justification for their position of power.

Two successive attitudes toward the passage of time can be discerned over the period. First was a notion of changelessness, almost timelessness -- the past, present and future are 'the same'. Next came a notion stressing antiquity and continuity with changes over time. Both of these statements utilised the then currently influential ideas of Newton.

Newton articulates his ideas of time in the General Scholium to his Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy:

Absolute true and mathematical time, of itself and of its own nature, flows equably and without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration: relative, apparent and common time is some sensible and external (whether accurate or unequable) measure of duration by the means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time; such as an hour, a day, a month, a year (Newton 1964, 81).

This idea existed within a larger scheme of Newtonian physics which describes a world governed by unchanging mathematically defined physical forces and composed of absolute indivisible particles of physical mass. Gravity, the laws of dynamics and the permanent particles were the true substance of the world.

There can be little doubt that the influence of these ideas was profound (Sambrook 1986, chapter 1). Evidence for this comes from the popularisation of Newtonian ideas by Addison in a 1714 issue of The Spectator (no. 565 9 July 1714. Bond, 1965). James Thompson expressed his excitement at this new world revealed by Newton, in A Poem Sacred to the Memory of Sir Isaac Newton (Sambrook 1986, 23). Leading philosophers modelled their ideas on the natural philosophy of Newton. John Locke's philosophical account of the term 'place', in An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1964, 99) is almost identical to that of Newton. The aesthetics of Hume and Burke both make use of the notion of universal forces (Sambrook 1986, 112). The attitudes of time held by the gentry are drawn from the ideas of Newton and, by association, derived their validity from the then acknowledged truth of these ideas.

The view of society was expressed in terms of the Great Chain of Being (Lovejoy 1936; for examples, see the work of Locke and Pope in his Essay on Man 1950). The natural world was pictured as a chain, with links from the most complex (God) to the most simple (the plants). The most complex is also The Most High. The human species was included in this system: Locke postulated links between the Hottentots and orang-utans, thought to be the highest order of ape. Social classes in England were similarly conceived, as the records of the demographers attest.

The living world thus resembled Newton's physical world, made up of permanent components governed by general forces. It was possible for time to pass without necessary change. Thus, social status could be considered a permanent component of a changeless world. The passage of time in this view is thus without consequence.

The contemporary material culture, classified as the Caroline, Baroque, Queen Anne and Rococo 'styles' provides support for this interpretation. They all stress order: the Caroline style expresses general laws of compositional order and the Queen Anne of geometrical order; the

Baroque emphasis is on the control of perspective and the Rococo of the natural world (Sinclair 1985). All these styles imply a sense of order unaffected by the passage of time. In architecture the Palladian style, enforcing composition according to Vitruvius's general principles on symmetry and order, had the same effect. They stress values that are timeless and changeless. Thus, through their material culture, the gentry framed for themselves a world and a society that would not change.

For a variety of reasons the Great Chain of Being lost its justificatory force. Early studies within the fields of zoology and geology suggested that the present resulted from processes acting upon a different past (Toulmin and Goodfield 1965, chapter 5). The Interregnum dissolved the link between God and the King by showing that society could be run without a royal-divine connection (Hill 1972). The gentry's attitude towards time subtly changed. Rather than stressing timeless values, they concentrated on the antiquity of their roots and continuity from them to the present. They justified their position by appealing to the past.

The literature of the period portrays the gentry as being apart from this changing world (Barrel 1982, 17-50). From this vantage point they could observe society in its entirety and manage it for the common good. The Seasons, a book of poetry by James Thompson and the ideal of The Spectator (the Gentleman observer able to look upon society from a disinterested, remote position) are examples of this distancing (Barrel 1982, 54 and 19). The positioning of the country homes in the landscape gives this image material form. Classicism comes to the forefront. The Neo-Classical style, while retaining the general principles of composition, brings both antiquity and continuity into sharp focus through the copious use of antique ornament, carefully copied by craftsmen from the original. The landscape gardens of Burlington and Kent are also authentically classical. The image is one of permanence. 'Roman' temples in the landscape, as at Stourhead, symbolise it beautifully.

Both assumptions -- changelessness and continuity from the ancient world -- express an attitude towards time that justifies the privileged position of a particular class through the use of a temporal metaphor. They thus express their vested interest in the notion of time itself. There is little evidence of the attitudes of the other classes. This could be the result of the loss of evidence over time, as well as an expression of the real situation.

#### Conclusions

I have suggested that there is a need to explore the way in which different aspects of time relate to different parts of society -- that the monolithic notion of a social time is unhelpful. The distinctions made by Goody (1968) between aspects of measurement, allocation and attitude toward time, and of historians (references above) who have identified various classes on the basis different interests, are useful

in this regard. Analysed in this manner, the temporal and the social can be related more specifically to one another.

Distinctions may be drawn between the urban and the rural and between the gentry and the yeomen/commoners. There is a marked contrast between the urban and rural worlds: in the urban environment there was a transformation from an internal, task-oriented time allocation to an external imposed one. This created marked tensions between employers and their employees. For the yeomen and commoners time is impermanent. Accurate time measurement for its own sake is unimportant. They measure time and orientate themselves towards it by reference to their tasks. The occasions of time measurement were, furthermore, marked by acts of impermanent duration -- recreations. Their only material relationship to time lay in their birth, marriage and death, expressed in written records and a gravestone. The gentry seem to be the only group who emphasise time as an abstract entity, evoked in their material culture.

These clear differences in social time within a single historical period emphasise the need to go beyond unitary concepts. There is a need to investigate the interests of social classes and to understand how they saw both themselves and their interests in time.

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GENERAL PERSPECTIVES

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RATIONALITY VERSUS RELATIVISM: A REVIEW OF "READING THE PAST"  
BY IAN HODDER

James A. Bell

Ian Hodder's latest book<sup>1</sup> evaluates current approaches to interpretation in archaeology, develops his "contextual" approach, and argues for a number of socio-political views to be used in framing contextual interpretations. His primary goal throughout is to find tools for recapturing meaning in the lives of prehistoric peoples. Hence his evaluations highlight the contributions and limitations of current approaches to coax out meaning. Likewise, his development of the contextual approach focuses on its effectiveness in reconstructing meaning. Finally, his support of certain socio-political views is aimed at utilising them to build contextual interpretations of meaning.

The two sides of any 'approach' -- method and theory -- are both given attention by Hodder. Appropriately he focuses on method -- on guidelines for formulating and assessing hypotheses -- in developing his contextual approach. Also commendably, he attempts to shape his methodological guidelines in light of the theoretical content (meaning in the lives of prehistoric peoples) that he wishes to capture. Even his evaluations of current approaches concentrate on the methodological pole, although his lack of clear distinction between it and the theoretical pole does contribute to some confusions. For the most part, however, Hodder's analyses of method, and recommendations concerning method, are guided by his understanding of the theoretical goals for which it should be designed.

It is to Dr. Hodder's credit that he analyses method within the context of his goal, treating method as a tool for attaining ends rather than as an end in itself. Methodological discussions in the Philosophy of Science, and in the methodological literature of archaeology, so often treat method as an end rather than as a means. The implication -- that method should be imposed a priori to justify theory -- has, to put it charitably, created confusion. In the first and third parts of the book, however, Hodder traps himself in another snare: he uses a relativistic conclusion -- that there are no rational guidelines for assessing theories -- that follows from the straw-man premise that positivistic method has failed. Taken literally, this conclusion is a methodological faux pas: it 'justifies' asserting hypotheses without serious rational assessment. That argument and its consequences for Dr. Hodder's book are the foci of the major criticism in this review and will be discussed in the second section. The first part of the review will offer a synopsis accompanied by incidental comment.

(Archaeological Review from Cambridge 6:1 [1987])